

Approved Minutes
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
February 5, 2014
Location: Kent/MSU Extension

Members Present: Candace Chivis (County Commissioner), Carl Blough (Ag Interest), Denny Heffron (Ag Interest), Russ Slater (Ag Interest) and Michele Van Houten (Conservation Interest)

Members Absent: Suzie Reinbold (Real Estate Interest) and Ed Robinette (Township Interest)

Staff Present: Stacy Byers (Board Coordinator), Debbie Green (Kent/MSU Extension Staff)

Public Present: Mary Swanson

Meeting began at 11:36 a.m.

I Welcome and Call to Order – Denny Heffron

Because there were new members, everyone around the table introduced themselves and their interest in the agricultural preservation issue.

II Public Comment – none

III Review Agenda and Declaration of Any Possible Conflict of Interest – none

IV Review and Adoption of January 8, 2014 minutes – Meeting minutes were reviewed by members present and corrections/changes were noted. Motion by Blough and seconded by Van Houten to adopt January 8, 2014 minutes. Motion passed.

V Old Business

a. Weeks and Hefferan Update – farms for 2014

Byers informed members present that the Hefferan (John D. & Margaret) farm is close to being ready to go, but will not be ready for the deadline in March. Hefferon gave an update that the farm was split after the death of the parents and the children, Sharon and John are now in charge. The goal is to make this preservation work next year in 2015. The option agreements needed to be in by February 18 to go before the Board of Commissioners.

Byers informed members present that Raymond Weeks had some health issues and he and his brother were now farming the property together. Byers spoke with Bill Weeks (Raymond's brother) several times. Ultimately the Weeks family decided not to be considered for moving forward with selling an easement on their property this year, but would like to continue to be scored and ranked for subsequent cycles.

b. Wege Foundation farms – FRPP Grant deadline is March 7, 2014

Byers confirmed with the Wege Foundation to move forward with two alternative farms (Gerard & Barb Poulias property and the Dennis & Dawn Hall property), in light of the Weeks and Hefferan properties declining for 2014. The Poulias property was appraised in 2012 and will require

a supplemental update for 2014. However, Byers does not anticipate a change in value from the 2012 appraisal. The Hall property will require a full appraisal. Both the Poulias update and Hall appraisal have been ordered. It is critical both are complete before the February 18 Board of Commissioners meeting to approve Option Agreements with the Poulias and Hall families. Byers then showed the location of these two properties. It was mentioned that the Dewey Francisco farm is also interested, but for 2015 and not this year. Also, there is the possibility of the Malone farm and the Roth farm for 2015.

The Wege Foundation is a great partner for the Kent County Agriculture Preservation Board. Discussion followed regarding the percentage of federal match and if the level should be increased. Byers' recommendation is to ask for 45% from the federal government instead of the usual 39%. By seeking an increase from 39 to 45% the board risks losing points on the scoring criteria.

VI New Business

a. Farm Bill Movement

The bill has passed and will be signed by the president on Friday, February 7 at Michigan State University. FRPP dollars available for five years.

b. LCV Educational Campaign update

Byers informed members present of the ideas for educational programs this year. There will be 3 or 4 bus tours to highlight the economics of Farmland Preservation in 2014-2015. Possibly in July, there will be a Train-the-Trainer all day training session with a power-point presentation and the audience is open to anyone, but focusing on township officials to get the word out about farmland preservation. Also trying to get some earned or sponsored media attention. VanHouten suggested Shelly Irwin from GVSU/PBS, she is always looking for topics, possibly farmland preservation.

It was mentioned that there will be a Regional Meeting of the Land Trust and Conservancy Conference/Land Trust Alliance on April 7-8 in Holland with the local food movement as a topic of interest. The landowner workshop in Lowell also stirred up some interest in the Farmland Preservation Program.

VII Other

Byers mentioned that she has talked with Aaron Hollister a financial analyst with Morgan Stanley about doing an educational program this summer for landowners, CPAs, agriculture attorneys and a segment on farmland preservation. It would be great to have the board members attend these educational meetings.

Slater had questions for the board regarding conservancy work/projects. Discussion followed among board members.

VIII Public Comment – none

IX Adjournment – meeting was adjourned at 12:56 p.m.

Next Meeting is March 5, 2014 at 11:30 a.m. at the Kent/MSU Extension office